

Exploring the Impact of Brand Authenticity on Generation Z Consumer Loyalty in Ghana's Emerging Market

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Abstract

Purpose: This study explores the influence of perceived brand authenticity on emotional and behavioral loyalty among Generation Z consumers in Ghana and examines how digital engagement mediates this relationship. **Methodology:** Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 220 Gen Z consumers through structured questionnaires. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with bootstrapping was used to analyze direct and indirect relationships among constructs. **Findings:** Results show that brand authenticity significantly predicts both emotional and behavioral loyalty. Among the dimensions, continuity, integrity, and symbolism each had significant positive effects on loyalty outcomes. Furthermore, digital engagement was found to partially mediate the relationship between brand authenticity and loyalty, highlighting its role as a psychological mechanism driving Gen Z brand relationships. **Implications:** The findings emphasize the importance of cultivating authentic brand experiences and fostering digital engagement to build sustainable loyalty among younger consumers in emerging markets. **Originality:** This study contributes to brand management literature by integrating Self-Determination Theory, Authenticity Theory, and Social Identity Theory to explain loyalty formation in a digital context, with specific insights from the Ghanaian Gen Z segment.

Keywords

Brand Authenticity, Generation Z, Consumer Loyalty, Digital Engagement, Structural Equation Modeling, Emerging Markets, Ghana

1. Introduction

In today's digitally driven and hyper-competitive consumer environment, brand

authenticity has emerged as a pivotal construct in cultivating customer loyalty, particularly among Generation Z consumers. Defined as the perception that a brand is genuine, transparent, and consistent with its values and identity, brand authenticity plays a critical role in differentiating brands in saturated markets (Morhart et al., 2021). Unlike previous generations, Generation Z which comprises individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s tends to place greater emphasis on brand values, social consciousness, and authenticity when making consumption decisions (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). As this cohort becomes increasingly influential in the global marketplace, their preferences are re-shaping how brands approach loyalty and engagement strategies.

Emerging markets such as Ghana are experiencing a significant demographic shift, with Generation Z constituting a large proportion of the digitally active population. This demographic is characterized by high social media usage, mobile-first engagement, and a preference for relatable, value-driven branding (Adjare & Nimako, 2023). However, most empirical investigations into the relationship between brand authenticity and consumer loyalty have been situated in Western contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how these dynamics unfold in African markets. The unique socio-economic and cultural conditions in Ghana, including the growing prominence of indigenous brands, shifting consumer awareness, and increasing digital penetration make it an ideal setting to explore this relationship (Asiedu & Gyan, 2024).

Furthermore, brand loyalty among Gen Z in Ghana is becoming less transactional and more relational. Traditional loyalty drivers such as price and availability are gradually being replaced by emotional connections, trust, and alignment with brand values (Ofosu-Boateng & Dwamena, 2020). Consequently, understanding how brand authenticity influences loyalty behaviors in this demographic is not only timely but essential for developing effective marketing strategies in the region. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge by examining this nexus within Ghana's emerging market context.

Problem Statement

Despite the increasing significance of brand authenticity in global marketing discourse, there remains a paucity of empirical evidence regarding its influence on Generation Z consumer loyalty in emerging African markets such as Ghana. While studies in developed economies have consistently shown a positive relationship between perceived brand authenticity and consumer loyalty (Bruhn et al., 2019), the cultural, economic, and technological nuances that define emerging markets often result in different consumer-brand dynamics. In Ghana, the rapid expansion of digital infrastructure, rise of local brands, and shift in consumer expectations necessitate localized research to understand these phenomena more deeply.

Generation Z consumers in Ghana are increasingly exposed to global and local brands through digital platforms, yet their loyalty remains fragile and highly contingent on brand authenticity. Unlike older generations, who may have been in-

fluenced more by functional brand attributes such as price or durability, Gen Z consumers demand transparency, ethical conduct, and cultural resonance from the brands they support (Adjare & Nimako, 2023). However, many brands operating in Ghana continue to prioritize traditional promotional strategies over authentic engagement, potentially missing key opportunities to cultivate lasting brand relationships. This disconnect may explain the relatively low levels of brand loyalty observed among young Ghanaian consumers, despite high levels of brand awareness and engagement.

Moreover, empirical studies focusing specifically on Ghana have been scarce, particularly with regard to generational differences in consumer behavior and the mediating role of brand authenticity. Without a nuanced understanding of how brand authenticity shapes loyalty in this context, marketers risk misallocating resources or adopting strategies that fail to resonate with the Gen Z segment. The absence of context-specific data hampers the ability of local and international brands to develop targeted approaches for sustaining competitive advantage. This study, therefore, seeks to address this critical knowledge gap by exploring the extent to which brand authenticity influences Generation Z consumer loyalty in Ghana's emerging market, thereby offering actionable insights for both academia and practice.

Research Objectives

The study explores the impact of brand authenticity on Generation Z consumer loyalty in Ghana's emerging market. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Assess the influence of perceived brand authenticity on Generation Z's emotional and behavioral loyalty in Ghana;
2. Examine the relationship between key dimensions of brand authenticity: continuity, integrity, and symbolism and loyalty outcomes among Ghanaian Gen Z consumers and;
3. Investigate the role of digital engagement as a mediating factor in the relationship between brand authenticity and consumer loyalty among Generation Z in Ghana.

Significance of the Study

The study holds both theoretical and practical relevance. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on branding and consumer behavior in emerging markets, with a focus on Generation Z a cohort whose values, preferences, and loyalty dynamics are still evolving in the African context. While numerous studies have explored brand authenticity in Western or Asian settings (Balmer, 2019), there is limited empirical evidence from sub-Saharan Africa, particularly, Ghana. This study addresses that gap by offering contextual insights that may inform global brand management theory. Practically, the findings will benefit brand strategists, marketing professionals, and policy-makers by shedding light on how perceived authenticity drives loyalty among Ghanaian youth a group increasingly influenced by digital culture and ethical consumption (Oppong & Osei, 2023). By identifying which aspects of authenticity resonate most with Gen Z,

brands can better tailor their narratives, platforms, and customer engagement strategies to build long-term relationships and competitive advantage.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to examining the relationship between brand authenticity and consumer loyalty among Generation Z consumers within Ghana's emerging market. It specifically targets individuals born between 1997 and 2012, who are active digital users and make up a growing portion of the consumer base in urban and peri-urban areas. The study focuses on consumer-facing brands across sectors such as fashion, cosmetics, technology, and food & beverage, where brand authenticity is a significant factor in purchasing decisions. Data was collected from respondents residing in major Ghanaian cities such as Accra, Kumasi, and Tamale to ensure demographic diversity. The research employed a quantitative approach using structured questionnaires, and analysis was conducted using statistical methods such as regression and structural equation modeling. While the study provides deep insights into the Ghanaian context, its findings may not be directly generalizable to all emerging markets due to cultural and socio-economic differences.

Perceived Brand Authenticity and Its Influence on Generation Z's Emotional and Behavioral Loyalty

Empirical studies consistently affirm that perceived brand authenticity significantly influences both emotional and behavioral loyalty among Generation Z consumers. Brand authenticity characterized by honesty, transparency, consistency, and heritage serves as a psychological anchor for Gen Z, a cohort known for skepticism toward overt marketing and heightened sensitivity to values-based branding (Balmer, 2019). In the Ghanaian context, Boateng and Narteh (2021) found that youth consumers associate authentic brands with trust and emotional connection, which subsequently enhances their loyalty behaviors, including brand advocacy and repurchase intentions. Similarly, Oppong and Osei (2023) demonstrated that local brands perceived as culturally rooted and transparent received higher emotional commitment and patronage among urban Gen Z consumers.

These findings align with the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which posits that individuals are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement when brands align with their values and psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Authentic brands meet these needs by presenting sincere narratives and purpose-driven missions, which Gen Z values (Sarkar & Banerjee, 2021). Moreover, the theory explains why Gen Z consumers, especially in emerging markets like Ghana, are drawn to brands that foster a sense of identity and belonging factors critical for building emotional loyalty. Empirically, the theory has been validated in similar emerging markets by Mpinganjira and Maduku (2020), who found that authenticity-based engagement triggers long-term loyalty behaviors among young African consumers.

Dimensions of Brand Authenticity and Their Relationship with Loyalty Outcomes among Ghanaian Gen Z Consumers

Brand authenticity has emerged as a multifaceted construct encompassing several key dimensions, notably continuity, integrity, and symbolism, each of which plays a pivotal role in fostering consumer loyalty. Continuity refers to the perception that a brand has a stable identity over time; integrity involves the belief that a brand is true to its values; and symbolism reflects the extent to which a brand enables consumers to express their self-identity (Fritz et al., 2019; Morhart et al., 2020). These dimensions are particularly relevant for Generation Z consumers, who value transparency, ethical behavior, and brands that reflect their personal and cultural identities (Sorrentino et al., 2023).

Empirical studies have confirmed strong associations between these dimensions and both emotional and behavioral loyalty. For instance, Kim and Sung (2021) demonstrated that brand continuity significantly enhances emotional loyalty by reinforcing consumers' long-term attachment to the brand, especially when cultural resonance is strong. Similarly, integrity has been linked to trust-building, which in turn drives repeat patronage and word-of-mouth intentions (Dedeoglu et al., 2021). Symbolism, meanwhile, has been shown to resonate powerfully with Gen Z consumers, who often use brands to project personal values and lifestyles (Kemp & McDougal, 2023).

In the context of emerging markets like Ghana, these authenticity dimensions acquire even greater significance due to evolving consumer-brand expectations shaped by digital globalization and cultural preservation. Ahn and Back (2020) argue that when brand narratives align with local traditions and cultural values embodying symbolic authenticity consumers feel a deeper connection, which can translate into enduring loyalty.

This relationship is grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that individuals are intrinsically motivated to engage with entities (such as brands) that fulfill their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Continuity fosters a sense of relatedness, integrity satisfies the need for competence and moral alignment, while symbolism enhances autonomy by enabling self-expression (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Therefore, each authenticity dimension satisfies different psychological drivers of loyalty, particularly among Gen Z consumers who are identity-driven and value-aligned in their consumption patterns.

Collectively, the empirical evidence suggests that continuity, integrity, and symbolism are not merely aesthetic or ethical traits but strategic levers for building lasting brand loyalty among Ghanaian Gen Z consumers, particularly within culturally nuanced and rapidly digitizing environments.

Contextual Moderators of Brand Authenticity-Loyalty Relationship among Generation Z in Ghana

Understanding the conditions under which brand authenticity drives consumer loyalty is essential in emerging markets like Ghana, where social, cultural, and digital dynamics shape consumer-brand relationships. Recent studies suggest that the effectiveness of brand authenticity is not universal but is moderated by specific contextual factors such as social media engagement, influencer credibility, brand

communication channels, and peer influence (Marques et al., 2022). Among Generation Z, these contextual elements are especially potent because this cohort tends to critically evaluate brand messages and peer validation before exhibiting loyalty behaviors (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

In the Ghanaian context, social proof expressed through likes, shares, and comments emerges as a crucial determinant of whether brand authenticity perceptions translate into loyalty. This aligns with the Social Identity Theory, which posits that individuals make consumption decisions based on perceived alignment with peer group norms and identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). When authenticity is reinforced through social cues and trusted influencers within the digital space, Gen Z consumers are more likely to internalize brand values and demonstrate both emotional and behavioral loyalty (Boateng & Osei, 2023).

Additionally, brand communication tone and consistency in the use of culturally resonant symbols play a mediating role in strengthening brand-consumer bonds. Research by Kim et al. (2020) found that authenticity-driven branding campaigns that embed local cultural narratives enhance brand credibility and foster deeper emotional attachment among digital-savvy youth in Africa. Therefore, understanding these contextual moderators provides nuanced insights into how and when authenticity translates into loyalty among Ghana's Gen Z consumers.

Justification for Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three foundational theories such as: Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Authenticity Theory, and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory to guide the examination of brand authenticity and consumer loyalty among Generation Z in Ghana.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) was employed to support the first objective, which assessed the influence of perceived brand authenticity on emotional and behavioral loyalty. SDT posits that individuals are intrinsically motivated to engage with entities that satisfy their psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Within this context, authenticity serves as a psychological stimulus that fosters affective attachment and behavioral commitment key components of loyalty among Gen Z consumers, who seek congruence between personal values and brand identity.

Authenticity Theory (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010) underpins the second objective, which examined the role of continuity, integrity, and symbolism as dimensions of brand authenticity. This theory asserts that consumers are more likely to form loyal relationships with brands they perceive as genuine, consistent, and identity-relevant. It provides a conceptual lens to understand how each dimension uniquely contributes to emotional and behavioral loyalty, particularly among young consumers who prioritize transparency and moral resonance in brand relationships.

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) informs the third objective, which explored digital engagement as a mediating

mechanism. This theory suggests that external stimuli (brand authenticity) influence internal states (digital engagement), which in turn drive observable responses (loyalty outcomes). In the digital era, especially among Gen Z, digital platforms serve as the primary touch-points for brand interaction, making this theoretical model appropriate for explaining how authenticity translates into loyalty through engagement.

Together, these theories offer a coherent and contextually grounded framework for understanding the psychological, ethical, and interactive mechanisms through which brand authenticity drives loyalty behavior in Ghana's emerging market.

2. Methodology

This section outlines the research approach adopted to examine the impact of brand authenticity on Generation Z consumer loyalty in Ghana's emerging market. It details the research design, population, sampling strategy, data collection methods, analysis techniques, and ethical considerations used to ensure the validity, reliability, and rigor of the study.

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to explore the impact of brand authenticity on Generation Z consumer loyalty in Ghana's emerging market. A quantitative approach was chosen to enable statistical measurement of relationships among constructs and hypothesis testing in line with the positivist paradigm. The cross-sectional design allowed the collection of data at one point in time, making it efficient for studying consumer behavior trends among digitally active Gen Z participants.

Philosophical Underpinning

The study was grounded in the positivist research philosophy, which assumes that reality is objective, measurable, and governed by underlying laws. This paradigm aligns with the use of structured instruments and statistical analysis, making it suitable for studies seeking to explain causal relationships between independent and dependent variables in consumer behavior.

Population and Sample Size Determination

The population for the study comprised Generation Z consumers in Ghana, specifically those aged between 18 and 27 years, who actively engage with brands on digital platforms and social media.

Sample Size Determination

A sample size of 220 respondents was determined using [Taro Yamane's \(1967\)](#) formula for calculating sample size from a finite population. The formula, which assumes a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, is appropriate when the population size is known or can be reasonably estimated. In this study, the estimated Gen Z population in Ghana, individuals born between 1997 and 2012 is approximately 7 million, based on projections from the [Ghana Statistical Service \(2021\)](#). Applying Yamane's formula to this population ensures statistical ade-

quacy and representativeness within the specified confidence and precision levels.

Sampling Technique

To complement the statistical rigor of the sample size determination, a multi-stage non-probability sampling technique was adopted. Initially, purposive sampling was used to select Gen Z individuals who actively follow or engage with brands on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter, aligning with the study's objective of examining digital brand interactions. Subsequently, quota sampling was employed to ensure demographic representativeness across gender, region, and educational background, particularly in major urban areas (Accra, Kumasi, and Tamale), where social media use is most prevalent. This approach ensured that while the sampling was non-random, it still reflected key demographic distributions within the broader Gen Z population, thereby enhancing the study's external validity.

Data Collection Instrument and Procedure

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed with validated measurement scales. Items measuring brand authenticity dimensions such as: continuity, integrity, symbolism, and originality were adapted from Morhart et al. (2015). Emotional and behavioral loyalty measures were adapted from Bairrada et al. (2019). All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms and in-person at tertiary institutions and malls. Respondents were given clear instructions and informed of their anonymity and voluntary participation.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by three marketing experts and refined for clarity. A pilot test with 30 respondents helped refine wording and item sequencing. Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs ranged from 0.78 to 0.89, indicating acceptable internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). In addition, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to verify construct validity and assess measurement model fit.

Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS (v26) and AMOS (v24). Descriptive statistics summarized respondent profiles and central tendencies. CFA assessed convergent and discriminant validity. The main hypotheses were tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine both direct and indirect effects. Fit indices such as CFI (Comparative Fit Index), RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation), and TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index) were used to evaluate model fitness. A threshold of CFI > 0.90, RMSEA < 0.08, and TLI > 0.90 was considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2020).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of their rights, including the right to withdraw at any stage. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured, with no personally identifiable information collected.

All data were used strictly for academic purposes, in accordance with the [Declaration of World Medical Association \(2013\)](#) on research involving human subjects.

3. Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic results indicate a relatively balanced gender representation, with a slight majority of female respondents. Most participants were between the ages of 21 and 23, reflecting the core of the Generation Z cohort. The majority was undergraduate students, and a significant proportion reported daily use of social media, reinforcing their relevance in studies on digital branding and influencer interaction. [Table 1](#) presents the results.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 220).

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	104	47.3%
	Female	116	52.7%
Age Group	18 - 20 years	78	35.5%
	21 - 23 years	89	40.5%
	24 - 26 years	53	24.1%
Educational Level	Senior High School	36	16.4%
	Undergraduate	142	64.5%
	Postgraduate	42	19.1%
Frequency of Social Media Use	Rarely	12	5.5%
	Occasionally	36	16.4%
	Daily	172	78.2%

Source: Field Data, 2025.

Objective One: To assess the influence of perceived brand authenticity on Generation Z's emotional and behavioral loyalty in Ghana

To assess the influence of perceived brand authenticity on Generation Z's emotional and behavioral loyalty in Ghana, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed using AMOS. The analysis focused on the direct effect of brand authenticity on two dimensions of consumer loyalty: emotional loyalty (affective attachment, trust, and commitment) and behavioral loyalty (repeat purchase and advocacy intentions). The model fit indices were within acceptable thresholds: $\chi^2/df = 2.31$, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.056, indicating a good model fit for the data.

The results of the structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis provide strong empirical support for the hypothesized influence of perceived brand authenticity on Generation Z consumers' loyalty behaviors in Ghana. As shown by the result, the path coefficient from brand authenticity to emotional loyalty was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.71, p < 0.001$), indicating a strong and positive relationship. This suggests that when Gen Z consumers perceive a brand as authentic characterized by attributes such as sincerity, consistency, and transparency they are more likely to develop deep emotional attachments to that brand. This emotional loyalty reflects psychological bonds such as trust, admiration, and a sense of connection, which are foundational to long-term brand relationships.

Similarly, the relationship between brand authenticity and behavioral loyalty was also significant ($\beta = 0.64, p < 0.001$), pointing to the tangible outcomes of authenticity in driving repeat patronage and sustained brand engagement. Behavioral loyalty in this context refers to actual consumer actions, including repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth, which are critical indicators of brand performance and customer retention. The relatively high beta values underscore that authenticity is not only a symbolic construct but also a behavioral driver within the digital consumer landscape of Ghana.

The overall model demonstrated excellent fit based on widely accepted indices: CFI = 0.961, TLI = 0.949, RMSEA = 0.048, and SRMR = 0.038 (see **Table 2**). These values indicate that the hypothesized model is statistically robust and fits the observed data well, enhancing the credibility of the results.

Hence, the study establishes perceived brand authenticity as a pivotal construct in shaping loyalty among Ghanaian Gen Z consumers. These results have profound implications for brand strategists operating in emerging markets, emphasizing the need to cultivate authenticity through consistent messaging, ethical branding, and genuine consumer engagement. **Table 2** and **Table 3** present the result.

Table 2. Model fit indices and explained variance.

Model Fit Index	Value	Acceptable Threshold	Interpretation
Chi-square/df (χ^2/df)	204.15	$p > 0.05$ (non-significant ideal)	Acceptable (model over identified)
CMIN/df	1.87	<3.00	Good fit
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.961	≥ 0.90	Excellent fit
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.949	≥ 0.90	Excellent fit
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.048	≤ 0.06	Good fit
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	0.038	≤ 0.08	Excellent fit

Source: Field Data, 2025.

Table 3. SEM Results: influence of perceived brand authenticity on loyalty dimensions (n = 220).

Path	Standardized Coefficient (β)	<i>p</i> -value	Interpretation
Brand Authenticity → Emotional Loyalty	0.71	<0.001	Strong positive influence; authenticity enhances emotional attachment
Brand Authenticity → Behavioral Loyalty	0.64	<0.001	Significant positive influence; authenticity promotes repeat purchase

Source: Field Data, 2025.

Objective Two: Examine the relationship between key dimensions of brand authenticity: continuity, integrity, and symbolism and loyalty outcomes among Ghanaian Gen Z consumers

To address this objective, the study employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using AMOS to explore how the three core dimensions of brand authenticity: continuity, integrity, and symbolism influence emotional loyalty and behavioral loyalty among Generation Z consumers in Ghana. Each dimension was modeled as an exogenous latent variable predicting the two loyalty outcomes.

The results from the structural equation modeling (SEM) demonstrate that all three brand authenticity dimensions: continuity, integrity, and symbolism significantly influence both emotional and behavioral loyalty among Generation Z consumers in Ghana. These findings provide empirical support for the multidimensional nature of brand authenticity and its substantial role in driving consumer loyalty in emerging market contexts.

Continuity was found to have a strong and statistically significant positive effect on emotional loyalty ($\beta = 0.58, p < 0.001$) and behavioral loyalty ($\beta = 0.52, p < 0.001$). This suggests that Gen Z consumers in Ghana are more emotionally attached to brands that demonstrate consistency over time, and they are more likely to repeat purchases from such brands. The implication is that historical brand narratives and sustained brand behavior foster trust and connection.

Integrity, which reflects a brand's ethical and honest behavior, also had a significant positive influence on emotional loyalty ($\beta = 0.49, p < 0.01$) and behavioral loyalty ($\beta = 0.44, p < 0.01$). This highlights the importance Ghanaian Gen Z consumers place on ethical conduct, transparency, and sincerity in branding. Brands perceived as morally upright are more likely to enjoy consumer devotion and repeat patronage.

Symbolism showed the strongest influence on emotional loyalty ($\beta = 0.61, p < 0.001$), indicating that when a brand aligns with the personal identity, values, or aspirations of Gen Z consumers, it elicits a deeper emotional connection. Its effect on behavioral loyalty was also significant ($\beta = 0.47, p < 0.01$), suggesting that symbolic resonance translates into tangible consumer actions like repurchase and brand advocacy.

However, the findings further affirm that emotional loyalty, often preceding behavioral loyalty, is largely shaped by how well the brand's values and image re-

flect those of the consumer. Thus, in Ghana's emerging market, crafting authentic brand experiences that emphasize legacy (continuity), moral conduct (integrity), and symbolic relevance is key to cultivating and sustaining Gen Z loyalty. **Table 4** and **Table 5** present the results.

Table 4. Structural equation modeling results—influence of brand authenticity dimensions on loyalty outcomes (N = 220).

Path	Standardized (β)	p-value	Interpretation
Continuity → Emotional Loyalty	0.58	<0.001	Strong positive influence
Continuity → Behavioral Loyalty	0.52	<0.001	Significant predictor of repeat patronage
Integrity → Emotional Loyalty	0.49	<0.01	Moderate, significant effect
Integrity → Behavioral Loyalty	0.44	<0.01	Ethical behavior influences brand re-engagement
Symbolism → Emotional Loyalty	0.61	<0.001	Strongest emotional predictor
Symbolism → Behavioral Loyalty	0.47	<0.001	Reflects personal identity's role in loyalty

Source: Field Data, 2025.

Table 5. Model fit indices and variance.

Fit Index/Variance	Value	Acceptable Threshold
Chi-square/df (χ^2/df)	2.14	<3.00
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.95	≥ 0.90
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.93	≥ 0.90
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.048	≤ 0.08
R ² —Emotional Loyalty	0.62	-
R ² —Behavioral Loyalty	0.56	-

Source: Field Data, 2025.

Objective Three: Investigate the role of digital engagement as a mediating factor in the relationship between brand authenticity and consumer loyalty among Generation Z in Ghana

To address this objective, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with mediation analysis was employed to test the role of digital engagement as a mediator in the relationship between brand authenticity and consumer loyalty (emotional and behavioral) among Generation Z consumers in Ghana. A bootstrapping approach with 5,000 resamples was applied to assess the significance of indirect effects, consistent with established SEM mediation procedures (Hayes, 2018).

Digital engagement was operationalized using a three-dimensional scale developed by Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie (2014), which captures cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement in digital brand interactions. The scale includes

items such as: “Using this brand’s digital content stimulates my curiosity” (cognitive), “I feel excited when interacting with this brand online” (emotional), and “I frequently participate in brand-related activities online” (behavioral). Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale has been widely validated and is suitable for social media-based brand contexts, making it appropriate for studying Generation Z consumers in Ghana’s digitally active urban settings.

The mediation analysis revealed that digital engagement plays a statistically significant partial mediating role in the relationship between brand authenticity and both emotional and behavioral loyalty ($p < 0.001$). This indicates that when Gen Z consumers perceive a brand as authentic, they are more likely to cognitively and emotionally engage with it through digital platforms, ultimately reinforcing their loyalty behaviors. In Ghana’s emerging market context, where mobile and social media usage is surging, this insight highlights digital engagement as a vital mechanism through which brand authenticity fosters consumer loyalty. **Table 6** and **Table 7** present the results

Table 6. Mediation results summary.

Mediation Path	Direct Effect (β)	Indirect Effect (β)	Total Effect (β)	Significance (p -value)	Mediation Type
Brand Authenticity → Digital Engagement → Emotional Loyalty	0.52	0.21	0.73	<0.001	Partial Mediation
Brand Authenticity → Digital Engagement → Behavioral Loyalty	0.48	0.19	0.67	<0.001	Partial Mediation

Source: Field Data, 2025.

Table 7. Model fit indices—mediation model.

Fit Index	Value	Acceptable Threshold	Interpretation
Chi-square/df (χ^2/df)	1.19	<3.00	Good fit
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.958	≥ 0.90	Excellent fit
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.945	≥ 0.90	Excellent fit
RMSEA	0.045	≤ 0.06	Good fit
SRMR	0.039	≤ 0.08	Acceptable fit

Source: Field Data, 2025.

To validate the measurement model, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed using AMOS for the four latent constructs: brand authenticity, digital engagement, emotional loyalty, and behavioral loyalty. The results revealed that all standardized factor loadings ranged between 0.73 and 0.88, exceeding the minimum recommended threshold of 0.70, thus demonstrating strong indicator reli-

ability. The Composite Reliability (CR) values were also satisfactory: brand authenticity (0.89), digital engagement (0.91), emotional loyalty (0.87), and behavioral loyalty (0.85), all above the 0.70 benchmark (Hair et al., 2020). Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct also met the 0.50 criterion: brand authenticity (0.66), digital engagement (0.71), emotional loyalty (0.65), and behavioral loyalty (0.60), confirming convergent validity.

Discriminant validity was established using both the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). For the Fornell-Larcker test, the square roots of AVE for each construct were higher than their corresponding inter-construct correlations. For example, the square root of AVE for digital engagement (0.84) exceeded its correlations with brand authenticity (0.68), emotional loyalty (0.63), and behavioral loyalty (0.59). Additionally, all HTMT values ranged from 0.53 to 0.76, remaining below the conservative threshold of 0.85, which further confirmed discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). These results validate the measurement model's reliability and construct validity, supporting its suitability for the subsequent SEM mediation analysis.

4. Results Discussions

Objective One: To assess the influence of perceived brand authenticity on Generation Z's emotional and behavioral loyalty in Ghana

The results from the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis provide compelling empirical evidence for the significant influence of perceived brand authenticity on both emotional and behavioral loyalty among Generation Z consumers in Ghana. The standardized path coefficients ($\beta = 0.71$ for emotional loyalty and $\beta = 0.64$ for behavioral loyalty; both $p < 0.001$) reveal a strong, positive relationship between brand authenticity and the two loyalty constructs. These findings suggest that authenticity expressed through brand transparency, consistency and sincerity plays a pivotal role in fostering Gen Z consumers' trust and emotional connection to brands. This is particularly relevant in emerging markets like Ghana, where brand differentiation and consumer trust are essential in shaping long-term customer relationships. Emotional loyalty, which reflects deep-seated psychological bonds such as brand admiration and commitment, is evidently strengthened when consumers perceive the brand as genuine and value-driven. Similarly, behavioral loyalty, evidenced by repeat purchases and advocacy behaviors, is also positively shaped by authenticity, confirming that Gen Z consumers are not only emotionally invested in authentic brands but are also willing to translate this attachment into tangible actions.

The robustness of the model is further affirmed by excellent fit indices CFI = 0.961, TLI = 0.949, RMSEA = 0.048, and SRMR = 0.038, all of which fall within recommended thresholds (Hair et al., 2019), reinforcing the statistical validity of the hypothesized relationships.

These findings are theoretically consistent with Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which posits that individuals are intrinsically moti-

vated when their fundamental psychological needs such as competence, autonomy, and relatedness are met. In the context of brand engagement, authenticity serves as a key external stimulus that satisfies the psychological need for relatedness, thereby eliciting intrinsic motivation to remain loyal to the brand. For Gen Z consumers, who are often characterized by their desire for honesty, inclusivity, and alignment between brand values and personal beliefs, the presence of authenticity fosters both affective (emotional loyalty) and behavioral (repetitive patronage) outcomes.

Moreover, the empirical evidence supports recent literature emphasizing the relevance of brand authenticity in the digital age. For example, [Morhart et al. \(2020\)](#) and [Gilal et al. \(2023\)](#) argue that perceived authenticity significantly shapes young consumers' emotional engagement and brand loyalty in social media and digital ecosystems. In Ghana's emerging market, where brand narratives are increasingly shaped through digital channels, authenticity serves as a strategic differentiator that builds trust and loyalty among digitally savvy Gen Z consumers.

Objective Two: Examine the relationship between key dimensions of brand authenticity: continuity, integrity, and symbolism and loyalty outcomes among Ghanaian Gen Z consumers

The findings from the SEM analysis reveal that the key dimensions of brand authenticity: continuity, integrity, and symbolism, each exert a significant and positive influence on both emotional and behavioral loyalty among Generation Z consumers in Ghana. These results affirm the multidimensionality of brand authenticity as conceptualized in prior research ([Morhart et al., 2015](#)), highlighting how specific components of authenticity differently and jointly contribute to loyalty outcomes.

Continuity, defined as a brand's ability to demonstrate consistency and preserve its core identity over time, exhibited a strong influence on emotional loyalty ($\beta = 0.58, p < 0.001$) and behavioral loyalty ($\beta = 0.52, p < 0.001$). These results underscore the importance of stable brand narratives and historical coherence in building and sustaining trust with Gen Z consumers. In Ghana's evolving digital marketplace, where newer brands regularly emerge, long-standing consistency in branding appears to evoke a sense of reliability and connection, enhancing emotional engagement and repeated brand interactions.

Integrity, capturing a brand's moral character and honesty, also significantly influenced emotional loyalty ($\beta = 0.49, p < 0.01$) and behavioral loyalty ($\beta = 0.44, p < 0.01$). These findings align with the growing emphasis placed by younger consumers on ethical consumption and brand transparency ([Bruhn et al., 2019](#)). Among Ghanaian Gen Z consumers, who are becoming increasingly socially conscious and digitally informed, integrity serves as a key differentiator in forming loyal brand relationships. When a brand is perceived to act ethically and live up to its promises, it earns consumer trust, which in turn drives affective attachment and repeat purchasing behaviors.

Symbolism emerged as the most influential factor on emotional loyalty ($\beta =$

0.61, $p < 0.001$) and significantly impacted behavioral loyalty ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$) as well. This underscores the powerful role of identity alignment in fostering brand connections among Gen Z consumers. In the Ghanaian context, where cultural identity, social status, and digital self-expression are increasingly important among youth, brands that resonate symbolically with consumers' self-image or aspirations are more likely to elicit deep emotional bonds and active brand engagement.

Theoretically, these findings offer robust support for Authenticity Theory (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010), which posits that authenticity is not a one-dimensional trait but a composite of several consumer-perceived attributes that reflect brand genuineness, heritage, and congruence with personal values. The results suggest that emotional loyalty functions as a precursor to behavioral loyalty, influenced by how well the brand embodies enduring values (continuity), moral soundness (integrity), and symbolic relevance (symbolism). This perspective is consistent with recent empirical works (Gilal et al., 2023), which argue that authenticity strengthens consumer-brand identification and cultivates loyalty, particularly among younger cohorts. Inferring from the study results, the data validate that Gen Z consumers in Ghana are not merely transactional in their brand relationships but are driven by authentic emotional bonds shaped by identifiable brand attributes. Strategic brand positioning that leverages historical continuity, transparent conduct, and symbolic relevance is thus essential for marketers aiming to enhance both emotional and behavioral loyalty in this key demographic segment.

Objective Three: investigate the role of digital engagement as a mediating factor in the relationship between brand authenticity and consumer loyalty among Generation Z in Ghana

The results from the mediation analysis provide compelling evidence that digital engagement serves as a partial mediator in the relationship between perceived brand authenticity and consumer loyalty both emotional and behavioral among Generation Z consumers in Ghana. The bootstrapped SEM approach (5,000 resamples) confirmed that the indirect effects were statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, suggesting that authenticity exerts not only a direct influence on loyalty outcomes but also operates indirectly through digital interaction behaviors.

These findings advance theoretical understanding by lending strong empirical support to the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), which frames consumer behavior as a response to environmental stimuli processed through internal psychological states. In this study, brand authenticity functions as the *stimulus* that elicits an *organismic* state here represented by digital engagement, a form of cognitive and emotional involvement with brand content online. This engagement then catalyzes a *response* manifested as loyalty behaviors, including both affective (emotional loyalty) and conative (behavioral loyalty) dimensions. Thus, the S-O-R framework effectively explains the mediating mechanism by which perceived authenticity drives loyalty outcomes through interactive digital experiences.

From a practical standpoint, these findings reflect the behavior of Ghanaian Gen Z consumers, who are not only hyper-connected but also value interactive and participatory brand engagements. Digital engagement, in this context, includes activities such as liking, sharing, commenting on brand content, participating in brand challenges, and co-creating content all of which deepen the consumer-brand relationship. When authenticity is embedded in these digital interactions, the result is stronger psychological and behavioral brand attachment.

Furthermore, the study's findings align with emerging literature emphasizing the role of digital engagement in amplifying brand equity and loyalty outcomes. For instance, [Chen et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Kaur and Rana \(2022\)](#) argue that digital engagement enhances brand-consumer intimacy by enabling real-time feedback, emotional resonance, and personalized interactions. By serving as a conduit between authenticity and loyalty, digital engagement affirms its role not merely as a communication tool but as a strategic mechanism for brand relationship development, particularly in markets where social media usage and mobile penetration are on the rise, such as Ghana.

Importantly, the partial mediation observed suggests that while authenticity alone can foster loyalty, its effectiveness is significantly enhanced when it is reinforced through digital engagement channels. This underscores the need for integrated brand strategies that combine authentic brand positioning with interactive digital touch-points to maximize consumer retention and advocacy among Gen Z consumers.

Hence, the study confirms that digital engagement is not a peripheral construct but a central mechanism in the brand authenticity-loyalty dynamic. This insight not only deepens theoretical discourse within the S-O-R framework but also provides actionable guidance for marketers in emerging markets seeking to build enduring loyalty among digitally native consumers.

5. Conclusion

The study set out to examine the influence of perceived brand authenticity on consumer loyalty, both emotional and behavioral among Generation Z consumers in Ghana, while also exploring the mediating role of digital engagement in this relationship. Drawing on the theoretical underpinnings of Self-Determination Theory, Authenticity Theory and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model, the research employed a quantitative approach using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) on survey data from 220 Gen Z respondents.

The results reveal that perceived brand authenticity has a strong and statistically significant impact on both emotional and behavioral loyalty, highlighting the critical role of trust, sincerity, and brand consistency in shaping Gen Z loyalty outcomes. Moreover, the study unpacks the multidimensional structure of brand authenticity: continuity, integrity, and symbolism each of which was found to significantly influence loyalty. Among these, symbolism had the strongest effect on emotional loyalty, suggesting that identity alignment between the consumer and

the brand is paramount for emotional attachment in this generational cohort.

Importantly, the study further demonstrates that digital engagement partially mediates the relationship between brand authenticity and loyalty. This finding aligns with the S-O-R theory, confirming that interactive digital experiences serve as an affective and cognitive pathway through which authenticity translates into deeper loyalty. For Gen Z consumers who are digital natives brands that not only signal authenticity but also actively foster engagement across digital platforms are more likely to achieve long-term customer commitment and advocacy.

6. Implications

The findings of this study offer several theoretical and practical implications, particularly within the domains of brand management, digital marketing, and consumer psychology, in the context of emerging markets.

Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on brand authenticity by empirically validating its multidimensional structure: continuity, integrity, and symbolism and their distinct impacts on both emotional and behavioral loyalty. The integration of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Authenticity Theory and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding how authenticity fosters intrinsic motivation and engagement, which ultimately leads to consumer loyalty. The study also extends the application of these theories within the Sub-Saharan African consumer context, an area that remains underexplored in mainstream branding literature.

Moreover, by introducing digital engagement as a mediating variable, the study enhances conceptual clarity regarding the mechanisms through which brand authenticity influences consumer behavior. This contributes to bridging the gap between traditional brand theory and contemporary digital marketing practices.

Practical Implications

For practitioners, particularly brand managers and marketing professionals operating in Ghana and other emerging economies, the study underscores the strategic importance of cultivating brand authenticity as a means to build and sustain loyalty among Generation Z consumers. Brands must ensure consistency in messaging (continuity), ethical behavior (integrity), and symbolic resonance with consumers' identities and aspirations to nurture emotional bonds and repeat patronage.

Furthermore, the significant mediating role of digital engagement highlights the importance of leveraging digital platforms not merely for promotional purposes, but as interactive spaces where authentic brand narratives are co-created and reinforced. Brands that actively engage Gen Z through social media, influencer partnerships, user-generated content, and personalized communication are more likely to convert perceived authenticity into actual loyalty behavior.

For firms in Ghana's rapidly evolving digital ecosystem, these insights point to

the need for integrated branding and digital engagement strategies that are culturally relevant, transparent, and aligned with Gen Z's values. Failure to do so may limit a brand's capacity to foster long-term consumer relationships in this highly skeptical and value-driven market segment.

7. Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are offered to brand managers, marketers, and stakeholders aiming to enhance Generation Z consumer loyalty through brand authenticity in Ghana's emerging market:

1. Invest in Authentic Brand Narratives: Firms should prioritize the development and communication of authentic brand stories that reflect their heritage (continuity), ethical stance (integrity), and symbolic meaning. Such narratives should resonate with the values and aspirations of Generation Z, who are highly responsive to brands that demonstrate transparency, social consciousness, and relevance.

2. Strengthen Digital Engagement Strategies: Given the mediating role of digital engagement, brands must move beyond passive online presence and cultivate interactive, value-based digital experiences. This includes using platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) to encourage two-way communication, personalized content, and consumer co-creation fostering emotional connection and behavioral loyalty.

3. Enhance Ethical and Transparent Practices: Ghanaian Gen Z consumers are increasingly drawn to brands perceived as sincere and morally upright. Firms should implement and communicate corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, environmental sustainability, and transparent operations, reinforcing the integrity dimension of brand authenticity.

4. Localize Symbolism to Reflect Cultural Identity: Symbolism was the strongest driver of emotional loyalty. Brands are therefore encouraged to incorporate local cultural symbols, language, and values into their branding strategies. This strengthens emotional relevance and fosters a sense of belonging, especially in a collectivist cultural context like Ghana and

5. Adopt Data-Driven Engagement Models: Brands should invest in data analytics to track and analyze digital engagement behaviors. This will enable more personalized and effective targeting of Gen Z consumers and help align brand authenticity efforts with actual consumer preferences and behaviors.

8. Limitations

This study is subject to several methodological limitations. First, the use of a non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive and quota sampling limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader Generation Z population in Ghana. While efforts were made to ensure demographic balance, the sample may not fully represent all subgroups. Second, the research employed a cross-sectional design, which captures data at a single point in time and thus restricts the ability

to infer causal relationships among the variables studied. Lastly, the data were collected using self-report questionnaires, which may be prone to social desirability bias or respondent misinterpretation, potentially affecting the accuracy of responses. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings and applying them to broader contexts

9. Future Research Directions

In light of the above limitations, the following avenues for future research are recommended:

Longitudinal Studies: Future studies should adopt longitudinal designs to examine how perceptions of brand authenticity and loyalty evolve over time, especially in response to brand crises, rebranding efforts, or CSR campaigns.

Comparative Cross-Cultural Research: Researchers could expand the study to include comparative analyses across different countries or regions, particularly within Sub-Saharan Africa. Such studies would provide a broader understanding of how cultural contexts mediate the authenticity loyalty relationship.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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